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THE NATION

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THE PRESIDENCY

Painful Reappraisals

One prediction in President Kennedy's State of the Union message last January has proved to be disarmingly accurate. "The news," he said, "will be worse before it is better." Last week, as John F. Kennedy closed out the first 100 days of his Administration, the U.S. had suffered a month-long series of setbacks rare in the history of the Republic. First came Russia's man-in-space triumph. Then the shockingly bungled invasion of Cuba. Finally, and belatedly, came the sickening realization that U.S.-backed Laos was about to go down the Communist drain.

Loss in Laos. Back in March, the President spoke determinedly of a U.S. "response" if the Russians failed to halt their aggression-by-proxy in Laos. Declared he: "No one should doubt our resolution." But Nikita Khrushchev obviously did. He stalled off Kennedy's proposed cease-fire for five weeks, stepped up the Communist Pathet Lao's guerrilla offensive. By the time Khrushchev finally agreed to a cease-fire last week, the Communist troops controlled about half of Laos. Even after the British-Russian announcement of a cease-fire agreement, the rebels stayed on the offensive. When and if the Communists go to the Laos peace conference, scheduled for mid-May in Geneva, they will appear not as plaintiffs pleading their case but as military victors dictating their terms (see THE WORLD). The U.S. had been cozened into



Associated Press

DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AT THE WHITE HOUSE*
In the first 100 days, a shocking series of setbacks.

standing by until it was too late—and Khrushchev had made it look easy.

At midweek, President Kennedy summoned Democratic congressional leaders to a White House conference on the Laos crisis. They came out of the meeting grim-faced and tight-lipped. "It was very distressing," said one, "very distressing." At week's end, with the news from Laos getting more distressing by the hour, the President called the National Security Council into session for the third time in eight days.

Time to Sing Bass. In the midst of his cold war harassments, Kennedy kept up his pursuit of national unity. Last week, before in face-to-face talks with Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and Arizona's Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. Last week, filling out the G.O.P. spectrum, he met with New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller at the White House, and later, visiting New York City for the first time since his inauguration, huddled with Elder Republicans Herbert Hoover and Douglas MacArthur.

The Republican leaders consulted by Kennedy responded handsomely, promising him their full support.

Some other political leaders were less silent in the face of actual developments. G.O.P. National Chairman Thompson B. Morton: "The time has come for

Government to sing bass in world affairs and not take refuge in shrill Byzantine ambiguities."

Beyond Moratorium. To have any meaningful influence on the course of the cold war, national unity has to be something more than a moratorium on criticisms of the President: there must be a set of policies for the nation to unite upon. So far, Kennedy has failed to provide that set of policies. Last week he made two public speeches—but in neither did he put forward specific proposals for action. In New York he used his speech to the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association to urge the press to refrain from publishing stories that are not "in the national interest" (see THE PRESS). In a speech to a Democratic gathering in Chicago, he spoke bracing words about the vast efforts that would be needed to win the cold war. But he left his listeners wondering just what he was calling upon them to do.

Astir in the Administration was a conviction that something must be done—if anybody could produce any ideas. This

* Seated: House Speaker Sam Rayburn, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Standing: House Majority Leader John McCormack, House Whip Carl Albert, Senate Whip Hubert Humphrey.



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"GRACIOUS—YOU MEAN TO SAY
THERE'S STILL SHOOTING IN LAOS?"

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